



Umulumgbe *ODO* masquerade traditional ritual performance as a social drama

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ABSTRACT

Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade ritual performance is an art form that reflects the creative work of the imagination of the people of Umulumgbe. It is an art form, characterized by the imitation of action that is serious and of great magnitude. *Odo* masquerade performance is a drama that deals with the social lives of the people of Umulumgbe, and their belief in afterlife which is being transmitted through time from one generation to another. It is also a performance that gives them the avenue to dramatize on how their belief system has contributed to their social wellbeing and on how they deal with the difficult situations that happen in life, especially the situation that has to do with the loss of a loved one. Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade performance is a social drama because of its ability to occupy the space between the real and the imagined, mainly as a result of the belief that death is not the end of life but its continuation in the other world that is, the spiritual world. It is a ritual performance that represents and incorporates all the belief and the thoughts expressed in connection with death and afterlife.

Key words: Umulumgbe, social drama, *Odo* masquerade, after life

1. INTRODUCTION

This study is about the *Odo* festival, an Igbo traditional religious public ritual among the Umulumgbe people of the Southeastern Nigeria. Umulumgbe is one of the communities in OjebeOgene clan in Udi local government area of Enugu State. *Odo*, which in Igbo language means “the spirit of the dead” refers not only to the festival, but also the institution which administer it and the actors which represent the dead as well. As the name suggests, the institution is said to act as intermediary between the living world and the spiritual world, and the festivals are commemorations of the co-existence of the living and the dead. Moreover, Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade represents the spirits of the male ancestors of the community.

According to the *Odo* belief, the dead visit the Earth every two years and live with the people for a period of six months, ostensibly, to see their loved ones and even settle scores with their enemies. The *Odo* festival is held at the end of each cycle to mark the “return” of the dead to their abode in space. The “return” festival which is known as *ezemaa* festival in Umulumgbe is the climax of the *Odo* season and also a signal of the end of their stay on Earth. During the *ezemaa* festival, every member of the community participates. *Odo* festival is a public performance usually held in public arenas, normally the markets and the village squares. The *Odo* actors execute their actions through masquerade characterized by elaborate theatrical acts and masks. An *Odo* moment is conceived as a secondary departure of the souls from Earth and thus holds a very profound position among the people. More so, it functions as a reenactment of the pain of parting with the visiting spirits. As a result, elaborate preparations are carried out for the event by both the actors and the whole community. This symbolic gesture is a sign of recognition and respect for the overwhelming influence of the ancestors which are represented on earth by the *Odo*.

The belief further has it that these ancestral spirits shuttle between the spiritual and the ordinary world. During the “visit” to the world of the living, the *Odo* “reside” either in the village grooves, forests, caves or other unusual places. Sacrifices in the form of food stuffs or domestic animals are offered to them. During the absence, these sacrificial items are offered to the *Odo* at the family shrines, village shrines and in the groove or at the cross-roads. At the beginning of any season, whether planting, harvesting, or during other festivals and initiation rites, sacrifices are offered to the ancestral spirits in order to express a communal appreciation for their support, protection and guidance. Another significance of the *Odo* to the living is the responsibility of policing the community in social, cultural and spiritual matters. This has thus been the traditional institution charged with meting appropriate sanctions for all offences against the ancestors, persecute, and punish all offenders, collect fines and perform propitiatory rites. The *Odo* masquerade thus functions as the final judge in time of disputes and helps in taking crucial decision that concerns the general welfare of the community.

This study is founded on the idea that drama is the backbone of the realization of *Odo* masquerade ritual. Ideally, this research will be an expansion of available studies which illustrate that African traditional rituals are established genres of drama. Notable among those seminal voices is Ruth Finnegan who uses the word “quasi-drama” to *exceptionalize* the nature of African drama (500). Hers is a Western paradigm of analysis; however, she charts a trajectory by which African drama is to be studied with a bias of African epistemological models. In this approach, the “quasi drama” becomes special drama, and these special dramas are to be found in rituals. In similar way, Victor Turner propounds a “theatre” turn in the understanding of rituals (1966, vii). According to him, the special nature of folk drama, particularly African drama in which he centered his research, lies within the dynamic of quotidian and fictive (1987, 6): there is an overlap between what is “real” and what is acted. Ritual participants for example are conscious that they are engaging in a “real” act yet, at the same time, they are aware that they are using fictive elements to execute that “reality”. African traditional dramas are thus, according to these seminal studies, best understood as social dramas.

Furthermore, Michael Echeruo’s “The Dramatic Limits of Igbo Ritual” is one of the key works which explicate the concept of *Odo* as one of the most illustrative of rituals in social drama analysis. It is a systematic deconstruction of the ritual in a quest to unveil the underlying elements by which the ritual sustains its nature and function. According to Echeruo, *Odo* ritual manifests as an overlap of three performance foundations: myth, festival and drama (23). Myth is seen as the nerve by which the narrative of the ritual hinges on; festival is the celebration; and drama is the enactment of the myth (21, 23). From the study, it becomes clear that the realization of Umulumgbe *Odo* ritual is highly dependent upon drama, the enactment and the means of realization. A given *Odo* festival will thus differ from any other of its kind only to the extent of place, time and actors of the ritual (22). The belief in life after death, being what is held in the minds of the people as the essence of the ritual, is thus relatively stable. The elements of place, time and actors curve special contexts within which the uniqueness of various festivals emerges. This means that the dramaturgy of a ritual is ephemeral and highly dependent on contexts; which are replete with ideologies.

“Myth, ritual and drama in Igboland” by Ossie Enekwe is related to Echeruo’s work because it is also founded on deconstructing the dramatic components of *Odo* ritual. While Echeruo’s is based on Western paradigms of analysis, particularly Aristotelian theory, Enekwe seeks to engage in an African perspective. Similarly, the study is based on the idea that myth is the substance of drama (37) in the sense that (re)enactments and (re)interpretations of the ritual are centred on myth and their belief system. Drama is thus the

"infrastructure" of myth, and together a ritual is realized (39). Further, Enekwe argues that the success or failure of the festival to adhere to the myth depends on the dramatic: dynamics of "impersonation", "conscious audience" and displacement of time and space (44). Another key insight from this study is that although *Odo* masquerade ritual involves both the living and the dead, the final beneficiaries of the ritual are the living (46). The ritual is about adding value to social and economic situations of the living. It is thus a space upon which fundamental values of the society are enacted.

This study employed an ethno methodology, a fieldwork approach which foregrounds the local social orders by which the people make sense of their world. It is also a methodology in which the overt is crucial to understanding the underlying. A combination of formal and dynamic models of translations has been employed in the analysis of this study.

Umulumgbe *Odo* Masquerade Ritual as Social Drama

In every society, in every period of history, the feeling of people is reflected in the various ramifications of their art. Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade ritual performance is an art form that reflects the creative work of the people's imagination, which is characterized by the imitation of action that is serious and of great magnitude. It is an oral tradition which is written and preserved in the people's collective memory, hence, it is a literature which is "created, delivered, and transmitted entirely by word of mouth, that is, orally" (NkemOkoh 840). Another scholar Noleen Turner also argues in "A Brief Overview of Zulu Oral Tradition" that literature "forms part of the human communication system, and when the language is used with particular care in terms of images and words chosen, it can be said to represent an artistic expression". *Odo* masquerade ritual is a product of Umulumgbe's collective memory which depends on live performance for its continuous preservation, dissemination, and survival. The performance of *Odo* masquerade as an art form enables the Umulumgbe people to bring their past to present which directly or indirectly influences their future; the collective fictional presentation and enactment of this past, is what qualifies it as a work of literature, moreover, it is through enactment that this past is preserved and transmitted for future generations. And according to Gary Edson in *Masks and Masking: Faces of Tradition and Belief Worldwide*;

Memory, as the foundation for tradition, directed thinking and aided in maintaining continuity. Symbols consolidate ideas into recognizable images to reinforce memory...mask assisted in identifying, organizing, and preserving social memory (196).

Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade performance is an avenue of maintaining and consolidating the belief system in life after death. It is important to know that the performance of Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade ritual is the third stage of death ritual in Umulumgbe and according to Victor Turner in "Social Dramas and Stories about Them, "tracing operation ends at the point at which the 'threads' to cause the occurrence of some other 'event' or 'converge' to cause the occurrence of some new 'event'" (145). Death is the 'thread' that causes new event and as a part of human experience is something that no one can stop, change or do anything about it and in order to still maintain the relationship between the dead, their loved ones, and the community in general, the dead has to be brought back to live by recreating it through drama, in other words, "re-fashion it in fresh form" thereby making *Odo* masquerade the agent of transformation and the bridge that connects the real and the unreal. Edward J. Brown argues in "Pisarev and the Transformation of Two Russian Novels" that, "art begins with abstract decoration, with purely imaginative and pleasurable work dealing with what is unreal" (151), he also goes further to argue that "art takes life as part of her rough material, recreates it, and refashions it in fresh forms" (151). Death is the transition of a person from the world of the living to the world of the spirit/dead. Death is accompanied by series of rituals which are performed in order to settle the living and the dead, and the recently dead person and the older dead persons. Death occurs when the spirit in a person leaves him and refuses to go back into the person's body.

The first stage of death ritual in Umulumgbe after the death of a member of the community is the burial ritual. In many cultures, the dead is not buried immediately because of the belief that he might have wandered far and lost his way back to his body. Most often the relatives and friends of the deceased keep watch over him for some days before he is finally buried. Although the family of the deceased will like to have him with them, but the world of the living does not accept a body without a spirit, and again there is the belief that the spirit of a dead person hovers around until he is properly buried. Burial ritual is a ritual performance that plays a big role between the physical and the spiritual; it is a ritual of status reversal.

Burial ritual performance enables the spirit of a dead person to finally accept his new identity and his new home when the body is buried and when the necessary rituals that will facilitate his transition are performed, on the other hand, the burial of a deceased person enables the living to accept the reality that their loved one is no more with them. Mary -Blossom Chinyelum Okafor in her work titled, "Theatre Of Life: Rituals, Transition and Progression Among the Igbo" asserts the importance of burial position in Igbo tradition which facilitates the reincarnation of the deceased. And according to Okafor;

the Igbo bury their dead ensuring that the corpse faces *owalowuwaanyanwuor*, the rising sun (the East) so as to ensure that the spirit sees and remembers to rise with the rising sun - if not, the departed may be made to 'oversleep' by its enemies, and thus will

forget to embark on that important journey to the ancestral land. The consequence of missing the prompt from the rising sun to embark on this ultimate journey is that the spirit will not be able to reincarnate. To the Igbo, the failure to re-incarnate is a disaster... the material and the spirit planes are two sides of one existence that unite to form one great performance on which there is an interplay of both the seen and unseen forces surrounding and impacting on human performances (4).

Furthermore, there is a difference between the burial of a woman and a man in Umulumgbe, a man is buried some hours after his death. The first ritual process performed after the death of a person in Umulumgbe is the visit to a soothsayer in order to inquire if the death is a natural cause or a human cause. The answer they get from the soothsayer determines the second step which is the announcement of the death of the deceased to the community. The announcement is performed by the sounding of the *mkpomkpo* (a wooden gong) by a woman from the clan. The next step after the announcement is the assembling of the kinsmen, this is to discuss how the burial will be performed, especially where the grave will be. In Umulumgbe, a man is never buried outside his compound except if the land where his house is built is not his ancestral land; this is because it is believed that a man continues to watch over his earthly home even after death. After the burial, the sacred drums known as *ikpa* are played by his kinsmen. The men who are culturally allowed to dance to the sacred drums are those that are younger in age than the deceased.

Ikpa is a very important part of the process of death ritual of a man in Umulumgbe; it is used to communicate to the spirit world of the coming of a new member. A woman's burial, on the other hand, is not as easy as a man's burial; this is because the family of the woman has to be informed of the death of their daughter first, after they have been informed, the woman's family will appoint some of their men and women who will go to her husband's house to inspect her body in order to be sure that the body is in a good condition, while others are appointed to visit a soothsayer, sometimes in a very far community in order to make sure that their daughter's death is a natural cause. Again, it is the duty of the co-wives and the *umuada* (*umuada* means all daughters from the deceased woman's relatives) of the dead woman to watch over her body until she is taken to her father's home for burial. But in a situation where the husband wants the wife to be buried in his compound, a special ritual will be performed. This ritual is known as *igoozu* (buying a corpse); this is done by using the woman's wrapper as a representation of her body. The wrapper is taken to her father's home with some palmwine and some money, which the amount of the money depends on the agreement between the two families, after the presentation of the wrapper, the same wrapper is brought back to the man's home. But the general announcement of a woman's death is made after the visit to the soothsayer is accomplished and it is confirmed by the soothsayer that she has died of a natural cause. This announcement is made on both sides, that is, by the husband's family and her father's family, the dead woman's mother's kinsmen are also consulted before the finalization of the burial.

On the other hand, a funeral is the second stage of death ritual in Umulumgbe. It is a ritual performance that its main purpose is to the benefit of the deceased. It is a ritual that is performed by the living in order to guarantee a better place for the dead in the spirit world. In Umulumgbe, it is believed that the more elaborate a person's funeral performance is, the better chance he stands to acquire a better place and even make more favourable friends in the other world. However, death is the initiator of the threshold which according to Arnold Van Gennep is analysed as preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition), and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation). Just as there is a difference between the burial of a woman and that of a man in Umulumgbe, so it is in funeral performance. The funeral of a woman is always more elaborate than that of a man, the reason being that the funeral performance of a woman is jointly performed by her kinsmen and women, her maternal people, her husband's people, and her co-wives.

Nevertheless, *Odomasquerade* ritual performance is not just the third and the final stage of death ritual in Umulumgbe; it is a unique death ritual, whereby the dead transit from the spiritual to the physical – the land of the human and it is this unique and symbolic feature of its performance that differentiates it from the other death rituals in Umulumgbe. The transition of *Odoto* the physical is marked by so many rituals. One of the rituals is the tying of palm fronds across all the major entries that connect every village in Umulumgbe with their farmlands or their streams, depending on where their dead transit to after death. And according to Arnold van Gennep (2004) in *The Rites of Passage*, the Umulumgbe farmlands become "the neutral zone" (18) which symbolically becomes the world of the spirit, hence, continue to be sacred throughout the stay of *Odomasquerade* in the world of the living. The crossing of *Odo* masquerade from the "sacred world/territory" to the world of the living is what symbolises it as a transition; this is because the palm fronds are symbols of boundaries that demarcate the physical world from the spiritual world.

Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade performance is a social drama because of its ability to occupy the space between the real and the imagined, mainly as a result of the belief that death is not the end of life but its continuation in the other world – the spiritual world. However, the origin of drama is hard to prove but it is assumed that it sprouted from ritual and religious performances; these rituals are part of the people's oral tradition which in one way or the other contributed to the formation of the identity and ideology of the participants. According to the Western critics, drama started at the festivals of Dionysus in ancient Athens, when Thespis with the help of a mask, impersonated Dionysus by stepping away from the group and assuming the role of the god Dionysus.

In *Greek Drama and Dramatists*, Alan H. Sommerstein (2004), states that “Thespis who came from Icaria in eastern Attica is the founder of Athenian tragedy ... and has won the first official tragic competition at Athens” (2). He also goes further to argue that “role-playing activities, perhaps of a ritual or semiritual nature, were part of Greek life, as they are part of the life of almost all peoples” (1). Alan Sommerstein continues his definition of drama as an “enactment of a story (whether adapted from a familiar myth, or freely invented) in which each performer, or group of performers, represents (at any given time) a person or persons in the framework of the story, speaking or singing the words of a more or less fixed text” (1). Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade ritual is a performance that transports the participants (the actors, the audience, and the community) “into another world and those involved are fully aware that this other world is pretend” (Elizabeth Bell, 125). Hence *Odo* masquerade becomes an agent of transformation that enables the actors and the audience to penetrate into the world of pretense – make believe, thereby, maintaining the relationship between the physical and the spiritual in Umulumgbe. Victor Turner defines activities especially the ones in which the participants have a common interest and share the same ideology as social drama. According to Turner in “Social Dramas and Stories about Them,” social drama “occurs within groups of persons who share values and interest and who have a real or alleged common history” (149). Turner also argues that social drama first manifests itself as “the breach of a norm ... This breach is seen as the expression of a deeper division of interests and loyalties than appears on the surface” (150). The breach which gave birth to the performance of *Odo* masquerade ritual in Umulumgbe, is caused by death, although funeral ritual performance acts as mechanisms that resolve the social tension and reintegrates the parties involved (the dead, the bereaved, and the community) by restoring peace, thereby making every party involved to accept their present status. And according to Turner, once the incident of breach is visible, it can hardly be revoked; hence a dead and buried person can never come back to life.



Figure 1 One of the *Odo* visiting his former home and he is being appreciated by one of the women in the family

Therefore, the only way for there to be peace in the two worlds and avert misfortune especially in the world of the human is through the ritual of redress which is performed during the funeral. *Odo* masquerade performance is a continuation of the ritual of redress that brings the two parties/worlds together in order to dialogue and this dialogue is only achievable through *Odo* masquerade performance which occurs after every two years in Umulumgbe. One of the purposes for the performance of *Odo* masquerade in Umulumgbe is to restore peace, maintain the relationship between the living and the dead, and assist in facilitating

the promotion of the recently dead and even those that will die in the future into ancestorhood; thereby strengthening the hope and the bond between the world of the living and that of the dead. And because of the magnitude of the importance of the ancestors visit to the world of the living, the present social structure of Umulumgbe, temporary ceases to exist in order to give way to what Turner calls “anti-structure.” Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade represents the spirits of the male ancestors of the community, who are always remembered through their reincarnation of new babies from their physical families, they also partake in the affairs of the community even after death. Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade ritual performance represents and incorporates all the belief and the thoughts expressed in connection with death and afterlife. However, Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade ritual is a performance that depends on the interplay between the sacred and the mundane world which its objective purpose is social and psychological; these objectives can only be achieved through its performance as a social drama. The social and psychological effect of the *Odo* masquerade performance is evident in the image below, where a returned spirit (*Odo*) goes to visit his former home and he is being appreciated by one of the women in his ‘human’ family. Apart from their social responsibility towards the community, they also use this avenue to bond with their living relatives who on the other hand are so excited to welcome them home. The living also use this opportunity to send some messages to those that recently died and are not yet qualified to visit their physical homes.

Looking at the above picture, one will agree with Gary Edison that Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade performance has “both psychological and physiological manifestation” (16). According to Noleen Turner, the oral tradition of a people “encompasses the psychology of the ‘oral mind’ which is determined by both environmental and hereditary factors” (58). And this is why the life of Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade ritual depends on its continuous performance as a social drama because it is part of the people’s heritage.



Figure 2 A human escort fanning *Elife Odo* masquerade

The Importance of Time and Space in *Odo* Masquerade Performance

Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade performance is a drama because of its “features of re-enactment and rededication” (Echeruo 31) for every member of Umulumgbe. For Richard Schechner, every performance is “strictly restricted to three unities, that is time, place – setting, and action” (33). According to Schechner, chronotope is a theory by Bakhtin which “explains how time is created and

manipulated" in a work of art (36). Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade performance, on the other hand, makes claim on both the past and the present which the present affects the future. The socially constructed time for the performance of Umulumgbe *Odo* ritual begins when the present social "structure" is suspended and the "anti-structure" steps in. Emmanuel Okpa the flute player, who states that, Okeagu Elife *Odo* masquerade, comes out from his abode when he hears the sound of the flute, confirms this. The sound of the flute tells *Okeagu Elife Odo* masquerade that it is time to make the journey to the human world. The coming out of the *Forest of Okeze River* (*Okeze River* symbolises the world of the dead for the people of Amabor village in Umulumgbe) by *Okeagu Elife Odo* represents a symbolic transition from the world of the spirits to the world of the human. The chanting of *nnawaaoo* (father welcome) by both young men and old men as he steps his feet from the thick forest of *Okeze River* to the human world and the singing of *Elifenwa Ejiekebu Elifegbogbo* (*Elife* the son of *Ejieké* is the ancient *Elife*) express the emotional and the psychological effects this performance has on Umulumgbe people. The singing of the song *Elifenwa Ejiekebu Elifegbogbo* is an expression of loyalty and pride. It is also a way of emphasizing his importance as one of the founders of *Amabor* Village and this is represented by the word *gbogbo*, which means ancient.

The use of the word ancient in the description of the age and the importance of *Elife Odo* masquerade by his human escort is evident from the action of *Elife Odo* masquerade during their transition from the world of the spiritual to the world of the human. During the transition, the masquerades passes through a stream called *Iyi Obenebe*, but *Elife* is unable to walk as faster as the others because of his old age. The distance between the world of the dead and the world of the living is a far one and this makes *Elife* masquerade to stop severally in order to regain some strength as they continue with the journey. Thus, prompting his human escort who also performs as the griot to continuously fan and play the flute for him as they make the journey to the world of the living. The playing of the flute, singing, drumming, and fanning are forms of encouragement and a demonstration of solidarity, appreciation, and respect to the ancestors. According to Noleen Turner, "oral performance involves visual dimension and audial dimensions. These aspects tend to heighten the emotional and dramatic impact, and also bring about a degree of audience participation" (60).

The use of walking stick/staff by *Elife Odo* masquerade is an indication of his old age and a symbol of authority. Carmen Dominte in "Cultures of Memory, Memories of Culture" argues that "time is revealed by space and space could be measured and understood by time" (74). Another symbolic performance by *Elife Odo* masquerade during his transit from the world of the spirits to the world of the living is his dancing to the shrine which is built at the entrance to the village of *Amabor* which signifies the end of the spiritual world. His dancing to the shrine is a sign of acknowledgment and honour to the gods of the community; it is also part of the ritual of transition. Time and space are very important element in the construction and the performance of Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade performance, because it is time that transforms the *Forest of Okeze River* into a scared place which is regarded as the world of the dead throughout the period of the performance. It is also time and space that transport the impersonator of *Elife Odo* masquerade as a spirit that is able to visit the living and communicate with them for some period of time.

The setting of Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade is between two worlds, that is, between the world of the living and that of the dead but all in Umulumgbe community. The world of the dead is evident when *Elife Odo* masquerade and his two younger brothers came out from the *Forest of Okeze River* where they were accompanied with singing and drumming by their human escorts, but as they reach the boundary between the world of the dead and the living, *Elife Odo* masquerade performed a symbolic dance which represents the entry into a different world. It is important to know that *Elife Odo* masquerade is the only masquerade that danced to the shrine, which is a representation of the border maker.

This shows that there is also some level of hierarchy in the world of the dead and according to the tradition of Umulumgbe, the consultation and appreciation of the gods are always the duties of the *onyeani*(the eldest man) in every village of Umulumgbe.

The hierarchy in the world of the dead is so evident not just in the spiritual alone but also in the "physical" performance of *Odo* masquerade in Umulumgbe. Unlike other *Odo* masquerades in Umulumgbe, that are always accompanied by the young and old men, Ugwuotagu the eldest man in *Ogwuge* village is the only one that escorts *AfugaOgwuge* whenever he performs.

Afuga Ogwuge is the oldest *Odo* masquerade in Umulumgbe and according to Ugwuotagu, *Afuga Ogwuge Odo* masquerade is the masquerade that leads other *Odo* masquerades home and this is why he arrives one month before the others. Although *Ogwuge* village is not the eldest village in Umulumgbe, his *Odo* masquerade – *Afuga Ogwuge* is the first *Odo* masquerade to appear in Umulumgbe from the world of the dead in order to give hope to the living. In other words, *Afuga Ogwuge* is the initiator of *Odo* masquerade society in Umulumgbe.

However, the use of shrine and palm fronds in the construction of boundary markers that differentiate the physical from the spiritual is seen by Arnold van Gennep as a performance "whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well defined"(3). The crossing of *Elife* and other Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerades from the sacred territories is seen by Gennep as the "threshold" which enables them to unite themselves with the physical world.



Figure 3 Elife *Odo* masquerade appreciating the gods through his dance



Figure 4 *AfugaOgwuge*, the oldest *Odo* masquerade in Umulumgbe

The ritual of bathing in the *Okeze* River, which in Umulumgbe is called *Ekewojeyiis* is a rite of "purifications" (Gennep, 20) which constitutes the rites of separation from the previous world and this ritual is performed by all the young *Odo* masquerades in Umulumgbe. There is a special meal called *ekorok* which is prepared by all married women in Umulumgbe, this *ekorok* is eaten by

the initiated men and all the *Odo* masquerades after their arrival to the human world. Again all the *Odo* masquerades in the community make a special visit to the ancestral market called *Nkwo* market some days after their arrival. In the *Nkwo* market, all the *Odo* masquerades dance and run around the market naked - the dancing and running naked by *Odo* masquerade in *Nkwo* market is called *inyiuguji*, this represents the rites of incorporation to their former world that is, the world of the living. The *Nkwo* market dance ritual is the rite that prepares them for the purpose of their visit to the world of the living. It is after these rites that *Odo* masquerades can walk around the community during the day except on *Orie* day that is known as women's day in Umulumgbe.

The construction of time and space for the performance of Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade ritual is a representation of a liminal space; it is the space where the transformation of the actors takes place. The performance of Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade ritual is a ritual that during the period of its enactment "separates" the people of Umulumgbe from their everyday life, places them in a "limbo that was not any place they were in before and not yet any place they would be in, and then returns them, changed in some way, to "mundane life". According to Obunigwe Nwa-igbanagokoro, "it is a thing of joy for one to live and witness the return of the ancestors to the human world". He goes on during the interview to say that their fathers handed down *Odo* masquerade performance to them and that they will continue to perform it.

Characters and Characterization in Odo Masquerade Ritual

Odo masquerades are characters in the Umulumgbe traditional *Odo* masquerade performance. Characters are the symbolic and the fictional creation of human actors who through the imitation of actions are able to bring the ancestral spirits to life by embodying the basic human "realities" in Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade ritual performance. The bringing to life of the ancestral characters is the sole duty of the initiated males in the community. The actors of *Odo* masquerade employ imitation, impersonation, costume, body movement and the modulation of voices in the representation of the ancestors. For example, *Elife Odo* masquerade and his two brothers are known as masquerades that communicate through the use of rhythmic gestures and movement. For Emeka Nwabueze in "In the Spirit of Thesis: The Theatre Arts and National Integration", "drama stands on a different pedestal because it can communicate without the spoken word" (10). *Elife Odo* masquerade and the two brothers are good dancers. Through music and dance, they are able to transmit knowledge and values and celebrate their coming home with the community and their loved ones.

There are three major categories of characters in Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade ritual performance and these characters are identified mainly through their costumes and the role they perform. These means that, just as there is a hierarchy in the world of the living, so the world of the dead are organized into a hierarchy with four categories of *Odo* masquerades: the youthful *Odo* masquerade, the elderly *Odo* masquerade, the traditional titled *Odo* masquerade and the children *Odo* masquerade. Every one of these masquerades has a specific role which he performs together with their joint roles. Their age and status contribute to their individual roles

The first category of *Odo* masquerade belongs to the youths (that is the young men) of the community, these *Odo* masquerades are known as *Odoenwu* masquerades. They are like law enforcement agents in the community. Their duties include promoting peace, and a healthy environment in their various clans. During the period of *Odo* masquerade, people hardly quarrel, the reason being that *Odo* masquerade whose duty is to watch over a particular clan, always appears wherever there is a misunderstanding especially the misunderstanding that leads to fighting and shouting. The appearance of *Odo* masquerade at such scene attracts a heavy fine which is to be fulfilled at that particular place without the waste of time. And in a situation where the parties involved cannot afford it or refuse to comply with the order of *Odo* masquerade, the masquerade will then call on other masquerades around his vicinity. These masquerades will then gather together at the scene and will never leave the place until the fine is fulfilled by the offenders. Many parents in Umulumgbe use the period of *Odo* masquerade, to bring their disobedient children to order by reporting them to *Odo* masquerades. Eke market day is a sanitation day in Umulumgbe during the period of *Odo* masquerade in the physical world. It is mandatory that every woman should keep her surroundings clean which failure to do so attracts a fine. The youthful *Odo* masquerades go from one vicinity to another in order to make sure that the women comply. And as scary as the sight of these *Odo* masquerades can be, no one will ever want to have them as guests in such condition.

The above picture shows a group of youthful *Odo* masquerades standing together in their different and unique costumes. The *Odo* masquerade in a short and dried palm frond is known as *Umorow Nwaeziugwu*, he is from *Amakeji* in *Akpator* village, and he is seen as the most energetic and the fastest runner among his peers.

The huge *Odo* masquerade in a combination of costume with a head decorated with a lot of *udara* (*udara* is an African white star apple) leaves is called *Okpo Udara* masquerade. He lives under an *Udaratree*. *Udara* in Umulumgbe symbolizes fertility and children; hence, he symbolizes fertility and children. One unique feature of *Odoenwu* masquerades is that they come back naked from the land of the dead, and then clothe themselves in the land of the living, unlike the other categories that come back in full costumes

provided by their kinsmen. The ability of *Odoenwu* masquerades in providing their costumes by themselves demonstrates their strength as the dead youths of Umulumgbe.



Figure 5 A group of the category of youthful *Odomasquerades*

The second and the third categories of *Odo* characters are in the group of *ezemaa*. They are the elderly and the traditional title members of the community before their transit to the spiritual world. These categories are generally known as *ezemaa* masquerades (*ezemaa* means king of the spirits), just as their name implies, they are the members of the community who died at their old age and their death rituals were properly performed. The *ezemaa* masquerades are very easy to identify. The use of walking sticks, local hand fan which their human escorts use to fan them represent their old age, honour and respect. The beads which some of them wear around the ankle represent their social status which they still maintain even in the world of the dead.

There is one of the *ezemaa* masquerades whose costume is entirely made from green leaves (Figure 6).

The above *Odo* masquerade is the guardian of farmlands and the mediator for agricultural bounty. There is a story that people use him to catch and scare away thieves and those that defecate in people's farms.

Apart from the traditional titleholders like *ozo* and *ichiti* titles, some of these men died as great herbalists, and they continue to maintain this gift even in the afterlife. These categories of *ezemaa* masquerades that symbolise the image of those that died as great herbalist/medicine men, are the ones whose special roles include purification, and the pronouncement of judgment on "evil" and unrepentant individuals or groups in the community. The cleansing exercise is performed towards the time of their departure to their permanent abode. The reason for performing the cleansing towards the end of their stay in the world of the living is to make sure that the good ones stay in peace and in safety as they go back to their spiritual world. The purification exercise is performed in the middle of the night. This is because night is always considered as the time of the spirit. Besides the general cleansing of the community, people also consult them for special cleansing which is usually performed in the person's house. During the performance of this cleansing, the *ezemaa* masquerade that has been consulted for the cleansing comes to the scene late in the night making a very scary noise and speaking in a strange high tone. All these help to create a fearful and a peaceful atmosphere in the surroundings and also in the life of the person whom the cleansing ritual and the pronouncement of judgment is being performed for or against.



Figure 6 One of the *ezemaa* masquerades in his special costume

The Role of Costume in *Odo* Masquerade Ritual

Odo masquerades' costumes are symbolic outfits that distinguish one *Odo* from the other. Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerades make use of masks in their representation of the ancestors. Masks are sacred costumes that play a very symbolic role in the performance of Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade. In *Odo* masquerade performance, costume becomes a "liminal space" where the actors experience what Turner calls "betwixt and between" which means that the actors of *Odo* masquerades are neither here nor there. In other words, the actors experience a kind of transition which leaves them with no identity. According to Turner, their condition while in the mask becomes that of a "very prototype of sacred poverty" (49). This means that the actors as "transitional beings" have no status - they cannot behave as humans when in the mask costume and they cannot also disappear because they are not spirits in the "real" sense. There is one adage in Igbo that summarizes this state of in between as *nammaduaburoanuelunkeojiabuanu ala*. In other words, it is a state that leaves one hanging, a state where the actor of Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade has no identity of his own.

There are two main types of mask costumes in the performance of *Odo* in Umulumgbe. There are the costumes for the young *Odo* which are made from palm fronds and green leaves. The mask costumes for the elderly masquerades are made from more

expensive and elaborate materials. Their costumes also include their walking sticks which adorn them with the aura of respect by the younger masquerades and their audience, because of the belief that they embody both the wisdom of human and spirit. *Odo* costumes also serve as agent of transformation which enables the ancestors to transform into tangible forms. The actors on the other hand through the transformative power of the *Odo* mask costumes are able to represent and impersonate the ancestral spirits and also commune with the living. Victor Ukaegbu (1996) also argues that “masks are created with a sense of power and sacrality which they retain throughout their performing lives (37).” The costume of *Odongwu Ogwuge* is a very symbolic one (see figure 4), as the oldest of all the *Odo* masquerades in Umulumgbe, his costume represents his age and status, in the sense that his costume is made of old fabrics that are torn all over. The fabrics used are also the ones used during the old days. Although these fabrics are still available in the Igbo markets, they are always viewed as the old design of Nigerian fabrics which the modern ones are always very skeptical to wear.

Odongwu Ogwuge's costume is a representation of his age, and status as the first *Odo* masquerade to appear to the living from the world of the dead in Umulumgbe. His appearance took place during the period of hopelessness which is caused by death and the fear of not knowing the present condition of the deceased in the world of the spiritual. The status of *Odongwu Ogwuge* is very evident from the praises he receives from the people as he performs some cleansing and walks around the community. His spectators always praise and appreciate him by singing the following song:

<i>Ochibeuzo</i>	The breaker of road
<i>Ochibeuzo</i>	The breaker of road
<i>Odo n'eduleteibenye</i>	The <i>Odo</i> that brings others home
<i>Nnam, nnam</i>	Myfather, myfather
<i>Ndinweobodo</i>	Those that own the community
<i>Orifodoruibe</i>	The one that leaves for others to eat
<i>Odo n'edileteOdo</i>	The <i>Odo</i> that brings home other <i>Odo</i>
<i>Ndianyin'ekwumakafe</i>	The ones we always refer to

Another interesting costume is the costume worn by *OnyeOcha Lett*. The name *OnyeOcha Lett* means a white man from Lett. Lett is the name given to one of the villages in Umulumgbe. It is also the village where the British colonial masters lived during the period of colonization in Umulumgbe. *OnyeOcha Lett's* mask and that of his brother, and his bodyguard are constructed to represent their skin colour, and their clothes symbolise western civilization. Law and order are represented by the cane which the bodyguard holds throughout the performance. Unlike the indigenous Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerades whose costumes are constructed from traditional materials, and with the belief that there are no shoes during their time on earth, are compelled to perform on bare feet. The costume of *OnyeOcha Lett*, his brother, and his bodyguard are made of white masks which represent their skin colour and their clothes are English suits. *OnyeOcha Lett's* suit is grey in colour while his brother's costume is black in colour and with their English shoes to match their suits, a police uniform, and a black shoe is made for his bodyguard.

Audience Participation

Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade performance as a social drama involves the collaboration of both the world of the living and the world of the dead for it to come into being and into manifestation. For the manifestation to take place there must be an established agreement between the two worlds. This agreement is initiated through consultation between the world of the ancestors and the world of the living, in the case of *Odo* masquerade performance, the consultation between the world of the living and the world of the dead is initiated and performed by the living through series of veneration and sacrifices which is performed by the chief priest of the community known as *onyen'ago Ugwu* in collaboration with the eldest man of every village and clan in Umulumgbe. According to Erika Fischer-Lichte in “Performance as Event – Reception as Transformation”, a performance “takes place in and through the bodily co-presence of actors and spectators”. The reason being that “every performance requires two groups of people, the ‘doer’ ... and the ‘onlookers’, who have to assemble at a certain time and place in order to share this situation, a span of lifetime” (29). The audience participatory response and their continual appreciation play an important role in sustaining the existence and the actualization of Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade ritual performance as a social drama. The participation of the community shows that Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade is a performance that cannot exist without its audience (the living). In other words, it is a performance that comes into being through the interactions between the dead (the actors) and the living (the audience). It is through this encounter between the *Odo* masquerade and its audience that “meaning is activated” (Okagbue 2008, 2), this is because the audience is part of the *Odo* masquerade performance making process.

However, the level of participation of the audience in Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade performance is determined by gender, age, and the status of the audience, that is, whether the person is initiated or not. The initiated men and boys often play more roles than the uninitiated. Audience participation is of great importance to the performance of Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade performance, this is because *Odo* masquerade “operates an encounter - participatory structure” (Okagbue 2008, 53). In other words, this means that the re-enactment of Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade as beings from the spiritual world that transit into the physical in order to “engage with its inhabitants” cannot be realized without the involvement of the audience. And according to Okagbue, “the nature of this engagement is participatory” for both *Odo* masquerade and the audience “who need each other for a performance to happen” (53). So, Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade performance is a collaborative venture that needs the interaction between space, performer, and the audience for it to exist.

The Conflict in Umulumgbe *Odo* Ritual

Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade ritual is a traditional performance that is constructed within the belief that there is life after death. Conflict is the backbone of drama and without conflict, there will be no resolution. According to Victor Turner, “social drama first manifests itself as the breach of norm ... once visible, can hardly be revoked (150)” The struggle for the redress of the emotional conflict which is caused by the death of a loved one and the ascension of the deceased to ancestor hood is the backbone of Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade ritual performance. The inner desire for a reunion between the living and the dead is made possible through the artistic presentation of the dead through *Odo* masquerade ritual. That is, Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade ritual as a social drama is an art form which enables the people to dramatise their inner desire of being able to be with their departed ones again.

The Place of Women in Umulumgbe *Odo* Ritual Performance

There are many restrictions during the year of *Odo*. One of these restrictions is that women are not allowed to stay late at night in order not to see a naked spirit since, as it is widely propagated, seeing it can cause an instant death or incurable disease. It is also compulsory that every woman in Umulumgbe should partake in performing the indoor ritual, which requires all the women stay indoor for a period of two weeks during the return of the young *Odo* masquerades and the final departure of all the *Odo* masquerades to their spiritual abode. Moreover, during the year of *Odo*, women are supposed to announce their presence when walking on the road at night. This is to alert any spirit that may be using the same road of the presence of a woman. It is believed that night is for the spirits/dead while day is for the living. Hence, a woman that walks at the odd hours is expected to sing the following song with a very loud voice as she walks to her destination.

Nwaonyenyeeooo!!!

Nwaonyenyenaagan'uzu!!!

Nwaonyenyeeooo!!!

Nwaonyenyenaagan'uzo!!!

A woman ooo!!!

A woman is walking on the road!!!

A woman ooo !!!

A woman is walking on the road!!!

The above song alerts the spirits of the presence of a woman and makes them to give way for her to continue her journey in peace

Examining this from the feminist point of view, one would say that the ideology of *Odo* masquerade performance being the men's affair is socially constructed for the continual dominance of women by the men. *Odo* masquerade performance serves as an avenue for the continuous preservation and the manifestation of men dominant power in the community. Victor Turner in “Social Dramas and Stories about Them”, states that “ritual involves a literal or moral “sacrifice,” that is, a victim as a scapegoat is offered... (151),” thus, in order to legitimize and exercise the dominance of men over the women, the women of Umulumgbe are made to play the role of a scapegoat through their continuous “indoor” performance for the sustainability of the secrecy of *Odo* masquerade. Judith Butler argues that “performativity is not a singular act, but a repetitive and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization (9),” in this view with regard to Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade ritual performance, the women's repetitive performance of the role of a lesser citizen has contributed a lot in solidifying the men's superiority over the women of Umulumgbe.

2. CONCLUSION

This study has illustrated how the Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade ritual performance can be viewed and analysed as social drama. It has used the theory of social drama as postulated by Victor Turner, in his analysis of the social drama category. It has also shown how these features suitably qualify as parameters with which Umulumgbe *Odo* masquerade ritual can be examined as a creative text. Subsequently, the *Odo* ritual performance of Umulumgbe can be seen as an imagined dramatic activity which sprouted from the people's belief in life after death. The study has also proved that the characters, setting, costume, dialogue, ideology and action of the ritual point towards drama. Furthermore, the study has examined *Odo* masquerade ritual as the men's construction for their continuous domination on Umulumgbe women through their repetitive performance of the role of a scapegoat during this ritual.

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